

ahead of her and opened the screen door, and Ruth stood on the porch steps, lifted Ranger over her head, and screamed, "HERE'S YOUR GODDAM DOG, YOU LOWLIFE SHITHEADS."

And she threw him, with all her might, through the open door, where he bounced off the wall, knocking a hole in the plaster board, and into the family room, where he demolished a monstrous and nearly completed beer can pyramid that his owners had been constructing for the last four days.

A LAPSE IN JUANITA'S DIET

Juanita was on a diluted fruit juice diet, trying to shed a few pounds for the upcoming bikini season. She was sitting on the sofa with a grumbling stomach, watching T.V. and changing channels with the remote control every time a food commercial hit the screen, when the doorbell rang: it was the delivery guy with a hot pizza for her husband Clete.

She ripped the box from the man's hands and drove her face into the steaming pie, tearing off huge chunks of it with her teeth, then shaking her head from side to side like a dog with a rat. Four bites and the pizza was gone. Then she started in on the box.

Back at the pizza place the shop's owner, Mohammed, asked Ramon where the money was from his last delivery. Ramon told him: "A grizzly bear got the pizza, man. A grizzly bear in a muu muu. I didn't ask for no fuckin' money."

Clete stepped in from the garage. He could smell pizza but there wasn't any evidence of one in the house. Juanita was watching the shopping channel on the cable, a big watery glass of grape juice on the end table by her side. She belched softly. Clete gave her a suspicious look. She giggled and said, "Excuse me."

EYE CONTACT

When Ruth and Ellis heard that Big Time Tony and the Tourniquets were playing the Acapulco Club again, they got themselves gussied up and headed on down, checked their coats with the hat check girl, and moved across the dance floor toward a stage-side table, Ruth's tumbleweed-sized bouffant wig brushing a waiter's tray and nearly tipping it over.

They ordered drinks. While Ruth checked her face in her compact mirror, pursing her lips and batting her false eyelashed eyes, Ellis caught a guy grinning at her from behind a beer pitcher, trying to make eye contact. He got up, went over, leaned on the guy's table, and told him he was going to get his lights punched out if he didn't start looking in some other direction. The man protested his innocence. Ellis tipped the pitcher into his lap and walked back to Ruth, grinning and straightening his tie.

Big Time Tony and the boys took the stage and immediately broke into an up tempo instrumental. Harmonica Steve blowing like a freight train, Bur Head Henry plucking the upright bass, pulling the strings way out and letting them slap back hard, then spinning her around and smacking her butt on the way, never missing a note.

Ruth and Ellis tapped their feet so hard that the ice cubes sang in their glasses. Ellis screamed over the music, "SHALL WE DANCE?"

And Ruth screamed back, "WHAT?"

"I SAID, SHALL WE DANCE?"

So they did, the diameter of Ruth's bouffant assuring them ample room on the dance floor. Then, halfway through the song, Ellis feels a tap on his shoulder. He dances away from it, telling himself he'll be damned if he'll let some bozo cut in on him.

The band took a break. While Tony and Henry and Steve got drinks at the bar, Big Ruben, the drummer, ducked out to the alley to smoke some dope. He leaned against the cool stucco wall, rubbing his back on the rough surface to get at an itch between his shoulder blades. He took a deep hit, held it, and watched through the rear screen door of the Chinese restaurant as a skinny oriental guy threw a handful of something into a hot wok as big as a back-yard satellite dish. The little man hopped across the kitchen and grabbed a wooden skimmer, hopped back and stirred his sizzling creation. White smoke rose, hit the ceiling, and folded back down on itself, forming a small mushroom cloud. Sharp, pungent, delicious odors floated out through the screen, tickling Ruben's nose. He wondered if he had time to walk around front and order something to go.

Suddenly a couple of old dudes came banging out of the back door of the Acapulco, one of them with a big wet spot on his crotch, like he'd peed his pants. They took off their coats, folded them, and laid them ceremoniously on top of the closed dumpster lid. Then they squared off, duking up, dancing around each other in circles, throwing

punches and missing by a foot, tiring, breathing hard, throwing more errant punches, and finally clinching and dancing over to bounce off the empty dumpster, ringing it like a gong.

Big Ruben took another hit, smiled wide, and watched the two dumb old drunk white motherfuckers shuffle away from the dumpster and then fall back on it again, harder and louder, bringing the little oriental cook away from his wok to watch through the screen. His eyes met Ruben's. Both men smiled. The cook jabbered something and shook his head as the two combatants fell to the ground and rolled into the middle of the alley. Ruben didn't understand a word of it, but he guessed it was something like, "These two silly bastards don't know how to fight, do they?"

BUTCH AND EVELYN: BACK IN THE BEGINNING

Evelyn had a bumper sticker on the back bumper of her Buick that said "LIFE'S TOO SHORT TO DANCE WITH UGLY MEN." Until tonight, that is.

Tonight she met Butch.

Butch is ugly: bald, bulldog-faced, bow-legged and fat. But like Evelyn says, "Lord, that man can dance."

She saw him in action on the dance floor of the Acapulco Club, frugging with No Tits Trudy, his feet gliding like he was on an invisible oil slick, sports coat unbuttoned and flairing with each pirouette, beer belly jiggling, dropping to the floor and doing the splits, pushing up into a handstand, then flipping up onto his feet and moonwalking, first backwards and then forwards.

Moonwalking forwards — nobody, but nobody, moonwalks forwards. Nobody but Butch.

Applause from the spectators. Butch bows, his shirt hanging out in back.

Evelyn staring, gape jawed, "Gonna peel that bumper sticker off, pronto," she says to herself.

Butch wipes the sweat off of his forehead and escorts Trudy back to her table, thinking, "If the band would quit playing this wimp music and break into something like Howlin' Wolf's Little Red Rooster, by God, then I'd really show them my stuff."